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ABSTRACT

Three papers and a listserv discussion about children's literature on the Internet include: "Potential Uses of the Net for Children's Literature in Schools" (Ashley Freeman); "Storytelling on the Net" (Barbara Poston-Anderson); "Writing on the Information Super-Highway--The Impact of the Net on Children's Literature: A Point of View" (Brian Caswell); and "The Impact of the Net on Children's Literature: Points of View" (Suzette Boyd, James Henri and Zoe Lake). (AEF)

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TOPIC C

CHILDREN'S LITERATURE AND THE INTERNET

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POTENTIAL USES OF THE NET FOR CHILDREN'S LITERATURE IN SCHOOLS

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The purpose of this paper is to focus on the potential rather than the actual use of the Net for children's literature in schools. In many instances this potential is, to a varying extent, already realised or being realised. However the discussion of what is actually happening and available on the Net with regard to children's literature in schools is covered in other papers offered, while this paper seeks to provide a more philosophical overview. Children's literature, as discussed here, refers to literary works, especially fictional stories but also folklore, myths and legends, plays, and poetry. Works which purely provide information on a subject are excluded. This is a common perception of what children's literature is, but it is far from being the only accepted definition of this subjective term. The term 'children', for the purposes of this paper, is used in reference to literature appropriate to secondary or high school students as well as literature appropriate to primary or elementary students.

What then is the potential for using the Net with regard to children's literature in schools? The potential is vast. The Net enables ideas and information on children's literature and its use in schools to be stored in great quantities and readily made available around the world at a low cost to the user. Anyone who has access to the technology, and the skills to use it, can not only draw from this potential pool of knowledge, but can also readily contribute to it. The potential information explosion for the teacher or teacher librarian, used to drawing their information on children's literature from the journals and professional texts they and or their school can afford, is immense! Teaching ideas, units, curriculum documents and schemes for using children's literature to enhance teaching and learning can potentially be readily made available via the Net. Students can contact authors to discuss their works. Teachers and students can contribute to and be part of programs which extend far beyond the physical environment of their school. Help and guidance can be sought by teachers on the many professional and intellectual issues which are part of children's literature.

Additional potential resources for the teacher librarian include collection development policies, selection criteria, censorship case studies, reviews of children's literature, information about authors and their works, information from publishers on new publications, information on and from professional bodies concerned with children's literature, discussions on the roles of the teacher librarian with regard to children's literature, ideas on the organisation and promotion of children's literature. In essence the potential access to sources and resources on children's literature relevant to the needs of teachers and teacher librarians via the Net is all and more than can be provided by conventional means at a fraction of the time, cost and effort.

This potential can be made more readily apparent by focussing for a moment on one aspect of teacher librarians' needs with regard to children's literature, namely catalogue records. Teacher librarians are keen to provide the best possible access to the children's literature in their collection through the catalogue. They are also generally keen not to have to create the catalogue records needed to fulfil this goal themselves! Teacher librarians normally obtain the records they need through a centralised cataloguing agency such as the Schools Cataloguing Information Service in Australia and New Zealand and school district or school board media processing centres or book jobbers in North America. These catalogue records are then accepted as given or further enhanced to better meet the needs of the school community. But the teacher librarian's awareness of what is occurring beyond her cataloguing agency and school library tends to be very limited. The Net creates the potential for teacher librarians to be able to access online the catalogues of a variety of school and other libraries around the world thus enabling teacher librarians to readily gain a wider understanding of ways in which access to children's literature can be provided through the catalogue. It also enables teacher librarians to assess the quality and desirability of records for children's literature being provided by different cataloguing agencies. Conversely it creates the potential for cataloguing agencies to make their catalogue records readily available for sale to a

much wider, indeed world wide, market by enabling teacher librarians to download desired catalogue records from the Net directly into their catalogue for a fee.

Many of you who are familiar with the Net are by now shaking your head at my naivety. Remember this paper is concerned with potential rather than what exists. What exists often, as yet, falls short of the ideals I have mentioned. There are good children's literature resources on the Net, many of which will no doubt be discussed in the subsequent papers in this area. However there are also many gaps in the types and range of information available in this field and many sources which do not live up to expectations. This I believe has occurred because of the less desirable potential of the Net in this field.

First among these is the potential for mediocrity. As anyone with the necessary skills and equipment can contribute to the Net, and these are not prohibitively expensive or difficult to obtain, there is little control as to the quality, authority or even currency of the sources in the field of children's literature on the Net. Second, there is the potential for irrelevance. Resources can be created on all sorts of whims and extraneous subjects relating to children's literature. Among these one might find some unexpected goldmines of original thought but there is the greater potential for a great deal of dross to be created which one then has to search through to find the material of value. There is also the potential for undesirable material to be published on the Net in the area of children's literature. This is a field with strong appeal, a wide audience and a variety of contentious issues. Those with a particular social or political viewpoint which is widely viewed as undesired by schools can produce material in this field on the Net which expounds their viewpoint under the guise of providing information. Some commercial interests might also succumb to the temptation to use the Net to push their product under the guise of providing information on the topic to which the product relates. Another negative potential is for vested interests to withhold information from the Net either because of sheer conservatism, or for commercial reasons, or because of the difficulty and expense of overcoming some technical problem. Such negative potential is part and parcel of the Net as it currently exists.

Another potential strength of the Net is the potential to be able to search for and quickly locate material on any desired aspect of children's literature and its use in schools. Once again regular users of the Net will probably be quietly smiling at this comment as the current reality as that searching on the Internet is frequently a time consuming and sometimes a laborious and frustrating process. A particular problem in the area of children's literature is that available search engines are best suited to searches for factual information. Many of the terms or keywords we tend to use to search for on children's literature are not of this nature rather being genres or words relating to emotions or behaviour such as 'fear' and 'bullying'. Current searches on such terms can frequently identify irrelevant resources or nothing at all. While there are problems with the current situation, the potential is still great. Search engines can potentially be developed with the particular needs of children's literature in mind. Appropriate search terms can be included in sources published on the Net to assist in their rapid identification and location. Many of these problems have been faced and worked through in library catalogues, they can also be faced on the Net. Indeed with a cooperative approach to this problem of access to sources on children's literature solutions could be found and standards set on the Net which could impact upon and improve the access to children's literature provided through library catalogues.

This discussion would be incomplete if consideration was not given to the potential for children's literature itself to be available through the Net. To examine such a possibility we need to again consider what children's literature is. The term 'children's literature' equates in most peoples minds with the book format. However many people now argue that other mediums such as video, audio cassette, CD-ROMs and children's television programs cannot be ignored. When Colin Thiele's Storm boy came out on video did it cease to be children's literature in its new format? Is listening to a taped version of a novel less worthy than reading the book itself? If we accept such mediums as children's literature when they convey stories for children, how can we exclude the Net when it is able to replicate all that these mediums can do, eg. video sequences, the spoken word, still pictures and of course text? What are the potential gains of having children's literature on the Net? Ready access to children's literature from around the world, possibly in a variety of mediums, would certainly be a plus, although the factor that a charge could be placed upon accessing some items needs to be considered here. The use of text in children's literature on the Net could also help restore

the desirability and status of reading for children who prefer the electronic media. Authors can take advantage of the technical potential of the Net to express themselves in new or less commonly used ways, eg. the combination of voice and still pictures. On the negative side the charges that are frequently hurled at most non book mediums that they rob literature of its imaginative qualities and that they lack the portability and convenience of books, might also be levelled at the Net. Removing the publisher as middleman could also raise problems with quality of content and presentation and result in a proliferation of trashy or undesirable literature for children.

Whatever our viewpoint on, or experiences with, using the Net to enhance the use of children's literature in schools the raw positive potential of this medium is undeniable. The extent to which this potential is realised or lost is a decision we will each contribute to.

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STORYTELLING ON THE NET

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Once when stories were told face to face and passed down through time by word of mouth, a listener's imagination was the key for entering into the world of story. Now when stories are detached from their tellers and appear on home computer screens, a modem is the tool for traversing space and tapping into WWW story sites.

Ever since the '70s, experimentation with the concept of STORY on computers has flourished. The range of offerings has varied from exploring imaginary worlds, to treasure-hunt games with identifiable characters, to fully developed works of hyperfiction. Today the multimedia industry is still said to be 'awash with attempts to reinvent storytelling.' (*The Economist Review* 1995: 16).

SO...

WHAT ABOUT STORYTELLING ON THE NET?

In the time BC (Before Cyberspace), traditional storytelling was most often low tech. An individual -- identified as the storyteller -- shared a tale, often pre-selected for telling with a specific group. Voice, words and gesture stimulated the imagination of the audience and helped listeners visualise the story in their own minds as it was told.

Story in digital form is extending our understanding of the storytelling process. From my observations, here is how storytelling is transformed when it happens on the Net.

First, to date, most storytelling on the Net is best described as "interactive" or "hypertext" fiction. Participants in the experience either determine the direction of the story by pressing buttons for pre-set pathways (eg. Theodore Tugboat) or actually create the story by writing it (eg. KidPub) or contributing episodes (eg. Where in the World is Darren "Gav" Bleul?). There are also some sites where books are reproduced directly as "on-line documents" from hard copy print sources (eg. StoryLand).

Story control is shared (eg. instead of one storyteller for each idea, there can be many). The notion of story as a package for cultural ideas, values, and mores which is shared with a group known to the storyteller breaks down as stories are shaped by unknown individuals from anywhere in the world. In addition, participants regulate story by choosing the pace at which to leave each screen and the direction in which they wish to travel (eg. forwards, backwards, in a different direction).

The audience for Net stories becomes an active participant -- not just by mentally imagining, but by physically pressing buttons and entering text. The distinction between storyteller and audience (ie. author and reader) becomes blurred. Story-reader becomes story-teller.

Reading, writing and keyboard skills, rather than listening skills, are needed for Net storytelling. "If you cannot read, then you cannot use the Internet." (Johnson 1996: 196).

Since many pathways exist through any given story, traditional story structure breaks down. Stories have more options and can have a multiplicity of endings or be open-ended without closure.

And now for the DEBATE -- Here are a few quotes meant to provoke discussion.

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ABOUT STORY AS COMMUNITY:

POINT - Gay Gooderham (1995: 8) writes:

"Once upon a time, we were a race of storytellers. Our ancestors hunkered down in their caves around a warm, protective fire and told stories. Sometimes they would even illustrate a tale with a drawing or two scratched out on the cave wall. In this way we preserved our history, passing on our stories from generation to generation. At the same time, we created a sense of community. The stories united us--we were bound together by the suspension of disbelief and the active imaginings of the storyteller... Today different communications technologies abound [but] I am afraid we may be communicating more volume, and more content, but less meaning."

"A hypertext environment should reflect our own complex humanity, but the tools to match our nuanced needs simply aren't available yet." (Guyer: 1).

COUNTERPOINT -
Douglas Rushkoff, a social commentator and futurist, writes:

"All this technology is like training wheels or braces on your teeth. It's training us to come together into some sort of relationship. Computers and modems and all these wires and satellites provide a conduit for human interaction and for the exchange of energy and ideas" (Casimir 1995: 46).

ABOUT STORY AS STRUCTURE:

POINT -

"Interactive fiction is all too often a failure, if a story in any standard sense is expected." (*The Economist Review* 1995: 16).

"The snag with most electronic stories is that they tamper with the foundation of narrative: structure. When stories wobble and change with our whim, they lose their believability, and with it our willingness to care.' (*The Economist Review* 1995:16).

"Which is the right word to click on? Which path generates the closest thing to a satisfying linear story, the sort that life, experience and thousands of years of storytelling have taught us to expect?" (*The Economist Review* 1995:16)

COUNTERPOINT -

So how important is story structure in our "post-modern era" concerned with "multiplicity, with equalised and decentralised authority... reflected in the structure of the Web itself?" (Guyer: 2)

Rushkoff suggests that: "Contemporary children are much more comfortable with discontinuity, with open-ended structures"[as in interactive fiction on the Net], more so than "most adults" who have been "raised on linear storytelling and expect everything to have a beginning, middle and an end" (Casimir 1995:46).

Besides when you think about it -- "The text as the reader imagined it ...never had to be linear, bounded or fixed." (Landow 1994:4).

And just imagine -- "In some not-so-distant future all individual texts may electronically link to one another, thus creating metatextual structures of a kind only partly imaginable at present." (Landow 1994:10).

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ABOUT STORY QUALITY:

POINT -

"Interactive fiction is still a technical novelty, attracting more programmers with literary ambitions than the reverse." (The Economist Review 1995:16).

In addition, "Tree-fiction" [as in, choose what happens next,] "quickly becomes unmanageable. (Ten two-choice branches need more than 1,000 endings). Authors who use trees fall back on artifice; regardless of how you choose, you get one of, say, four endings." (The Economist Review 1995:16)

COUNTERPOINT -

"At this stage of its development, story as it's presented on the Net most often seems to be an excuse to experiment with the technology. Maybe concern for quality will follow as the medium matures."

ABOUT STORY ACCESSIBILITY ON THE NET:

"Not everyone can afford a computer." (Astor 1995:32).

One teenager reminds us that today's innovative technology tomorrow will be commonplace: "Computers? They're just a part of everyday life, like TV and reading." (Mellon 1995:284).

By the year 2000, estimates are that there will be between 200 million and 1 billion internauts (ie. users of the Net.) (Metcalfe 1995:64).

STORYTELLING ON THE NET: A SAMPLER

Have a look at these and decide for yourself...

Story sites designed for children:

<http://lindy.stanford.edu/~treister/story/Step00> (Intomi Infoseek).
Fonzo Explores the Universe is called by its creators an "experiment in interactive story building." Developed by students, staff and the community, the main character, Fonzo, visits actual places such as Mars and the Milky Way. The story has pre-set pathways which provide some factual and some whimsical information on each place visited.

<http://www.ipl.sils.umich.edu:80/youth/StoryHour>
The Internet Public Library Storyhour presents hypertext stories -- most of them from traditional tales and designed with children in mind. Appropriate screen design and appealing illustrations combine with hypertext links to make these stories ones with which young children can easily interact. The tales are: The Tortoise and the Hare, Molly Whuppie, Do Spiders Live on the World Wide Web?, The Fisherman and His Wife, and The Boy Who Drew Cats.

<http://www.en-garde.com:80/Kidpub/>
PubKid is a site where children tell their stories on the Net. Children as young as seven have contributed. Following each story a short biography of the child teller is given.

<http://www. members.gnn.com/shickman/main.htm>
Storyland contains stories reproduced in text form (no illustrations) from novels (eg. The Wizard of Oz) and fairytales (eg. Beauty and the Beast, Cinderella). This site also indexes other story sites on the Net.

<http://www.webspace.com/~storyweb/>
Storyweb is a "Safe Kidz Site" for spinning tales. The storyteller is Mike T. Mullen who has spun yarns for children for over six years. Complete text for stories with some illustrations are provided.

<http://www.cochran.com/tt.html>
Theodore Tugboat is a lively hypertext story based on a Canadian TV series created for children complete with colourful illustrations. The links that occur within the text provide additional information about the characters or give children the opportunity to choose what happens next.

Story sites not specifically designed for children:

<http://www.swarthmore.edu:80/~sjohnson/stories>
Story Resources Available on the Web is a great site for directing you to other story sites. A good starting point .

<http://www.AustraliaSt.uts.edu.au/>
Australia Street is a hypermedia story with some sounds, illustrations and accounts of people who live on several different streets named for their country. Links provide contextual information. This site was developed by researchers at the University of Technology, Sydney.

<http://www.ccnga.uwaterloo.ca/~rkleitma/xmas2000.html>
Christmas 2000: Spot's Third First Christmas is described as "a playful Internet experiment in tree fiction." (The Economist Review 1995:16)

<http://www.thespot.com>
Don't be fooled! The story may be about ***Spot***, the dog, but the complexity of ideas and language means it is not constructed with children in mind. (BPA) The Spot is an award winning "cyber-soap" about the life of a 23 year old named Tara Hartwick. This student film-maker and her friends record daily journal entries which are on the Net for the world to see. This site has been described as "an experiment in narrative" which "successfully abandons linear storytelling." Jon Casimir, "Net dwellers bare all their secrets in a real cyber-soap," (Sydney Morning Herald 1995: 6).

For a spoof on The Spot, based on a group of "no-hopers" who live in a mobile home in ***Nowhere Missouri***, see **<http://theory.physics.missouri.edu/~georges/Josh/squat/welcome.html>**.

<http://www.nuc.berkeley.edu/neutronics/gav/wayfarence/welcome.html>.
Where in the World is Darren "Gav" Bleuel? is a moderated (ie. vetted) "Choose-your-own-adventure" type of story where YOU get to write the story. The site was started on August 21, 1995, and has over 2490 total episodes.

WHAT DO I REALLY THINK ABOUT STORYTELLING ON THE NET?

As a CYBERNAUT -- I'm impressed! Just gimme more of those gimmicks and surprises. I wanta be in control and surf my way through stories. I might even sign up for a news group (eg. alt.arts.storytelling) or, if I've got enough memory in my computer, I'll download "Virtual Chat" and see if I can use it to tell stories more directly -- you know, really get in touch with people.

As an EDUCATOR -- I'm concerned! How does one balance the undeniable appeal of technology for children with the need for educational experiences which are structured and designed for learning outcomes? The questionable quality of some of the story sites and the slow pace of accessing them -- even when they do have something to offer-- makes me feel ambivalent. Also, I'm troubled about equity. At least the oral nature of traditional storytelling enabled everyone present to listen and learn. So far stories on the NET require the ability to read, write, and have access to a computer as a pre-requisite. The worry is that some children will be left even further behind.

As a former TEACHER LIBRARIAN -- I'm amazed! An investigation like this makes me understand why some TLs already think of themselves as information managers and even as cybrarians.

Helping students and teachers access and evaluate information, including story, on the Net is a daunting, but important task. Where will we fit it into our priorities?

As a TRADITIONAL STORYTELLER -- I'm annoyed! Story is more than content and structure -- it's about identity and the human element that links us together. A smile, a nod, a verbalised OOOH or AHH, are all valuable signals from the audience to a storyteller in live performance. Even when virtual storytelling environments advance to the point where direct interactivity between storyteller and audience is possible on the Net, I seriously question whether there will ever be anything like the direct immediacy of the traditional storytelling experience. Some things cannot be improved upon -- traditional storytelling is one of these!

The topic -- Storytelling on the Net -- raises profound educational, ethical and social issues.

What do YOU think about STORYTELLING on the NET?

Please share your thoughts and concerns -- and if you find any other storytelling sites worthy of note -- we'd all love to know!

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WRITING ON THE INFORMATION SUPER-HIGHWAY - THE IMPACT OF THE NET ON CHILDREN'S LITERATURE: A POINT OF VIEW

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One of my pet hates, as a driver, is moving along in the inside lane of the highway at my usual five kilometres or so over the speed limit, (which means incidentally, being overtaken by just about all the vehicles on the road -- especially those over ten tonnes -- a situation that in itself, doesn't bother me at all), then coming around a bend and finding myself confronted with the posterior aspect of a lycra-clad health-fanatic on a ten-speed, alloy-framed, state-of the-art racing-bike, complete with reflectors, throbbing red tail-light and all the standard safety features, which, in spite of the fact that it probably cost twice as much as the 1976 120Y that I'm driving which has trouble maintaining a speed of fifteen kilometres a week -- or so it seems, as I step desperately on the brake, not daring to look in my rear-view mirror for fear of what I might see looming there.

It isn't that I have anything against riding bikes, or exercise, *per se*. I don't even hate the cyclist particularly, despite the fact that it usually takes somewhere between a kilometre and the rest of my journey home to squeeze into the other lane and get past the barely-mobile impediment. (Maybe I *do* hate him, after all!) It just strikes me as an absurdly inappropriate mode of transportation to be using in a transport system which has advanced so far beyond it.

Then, last year, along comes an invitation to take part in a panel-session at the Melbourne (Australia) Writers' Festival on 'Writing on the Information Super-Highway' and I begin to feel something of what that poor cyclist must feel, every time he hears the squeal of approaching tyres.

Me, who thinks it's pretty swish that I own *both* a superannuated 286 desk-top, and a bottom-of-the-line Toshiba T1200 lap-top, and can type, save and print without deleting half a novel in the process.

The first thing that happens, of course, is that I phone the panel coordinator to glean some information about the form the session will take.

His first question? 'Do you have email?' I'm about to tell him that all our white goods are Hoover or Samsung, when I realise that he is referring to electronic mail, which I've read about somewhere, and which is, I believe, a great way to share information, without actually having to go out and meet anyone or kill any trees.

I tell him no.

'Well, how about a fax, then?'

'Sorry,' I admit, cringing, and trying to pedal a little faster.

So he generously agrees to print the information and post it to me via 'snail-mail'; which he does, and I receive it a week and a half later. Not an auspicious beginning.

But it does start me thinking. It is patently obvious that I have not been asked to take part for the sake of my technical expertise -- which might be the equivalent of asking cyclist Kathy Watt to co-drive one of the cars in the Australian Grand Prix. So why me?

Perhaps, because, as a writer for young people, I have chosen as my audience the first generation actually born *in* to the Information Revolution. Perhaps, because, as a creative writer, my perspective on developments along the Information Super-Highway might be different to that of those panel-members who are acknowledged experts in the field of communications technology. Perhaps because I sometimes show an interest in science-fiction. Who knows?

Anyway, I went -- and I spoke...

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I write novels; which is to say, I take a given amount of factual information and experience and synthesise them into a piece of art that is, hopefully, more than the sum of all its parts. Literature relies for its effect on the interplay of subtle moral, psychological and sociological factors, which allows author and reader to 'interface' on a level that all the advances in information technology have not come even close to matching.

Lost amongst the dazzling array of better and more efficient ways to store and share information, many commentators have fallen into the trap of equating Literature with information, and assuming that the medium is indeed the message.

This is the point of view that leads to the doomsayers' litany of hopelessness -- *reading is no longer relevant; information is far more easily available in other forms; a CD-ROM is worth a thousand books. The book is dead, long live the database! Prepare ye a tomb for the tome!*

All of which may very well be true in relation to pure information, but literature; fiction, poetry, drama; requires soul - that human quality infinitely harder to duplicate than even the elusive goal of AI (Artificial Intelligence). There is no formula that designates soul, no parameters within which it may adequately be imprisoned. And therefore, no way a machine can emulate it. At least, not in the foreseeable future.

Film, television, videos, computers, the fax, the modem... email; the whole Information Revolution. We can't spin around three times chanting, 'I divorce thee. I divorce thee. I divorce thee.' and expect them to just disappear. For better or for worse, we live in the final decade of the most revolutionary century in human history, and there is no going back; we are married to the changes which have overtaken us -- and so are our children. Whether or not we like the society we have helped to create is irrelevant. It exists -- and I happen to think that in any but the most emasculated form, must continue, artistically, to evolve. This is true for both adults' and younger readers' fiction.

Just as the growth of civilisation transformed the myths, epics and sagas of the Oral tradition into the medieval poetry and drama; just as the printing press, and then the growth, in the 18th and 19th Centuries, of an educated middle-class, provided the catalyst for the development of the novel itself, and just as universal education produced, as one of its by-products, an explosion of 'popular fiction', so we see a continued, gradual evolution in the way stories and truths are told.

Now that evolution is set to go into overdrive.

Today's youth, the under-twenties, the 'post-Spielberg' generation, are the first generation for whom Literature in its written form is in danger of becoming an anachronism. They experience the world first-hand, as-it-happens. They ' interact' with it from the safety of their desk or lounge chair, or the comfort of a cinema seat. Emotion, information, story; it surrounds them and absorbs them. If Literature is to speak its magic to them, it must reach them where they live, and move them beyond the limits of mere information and superficial plot. And to do so, it must adopt a form which allows for interactive reading.

There can be no doubt that our perceptions are influenced by what we see constantly about us -- or on the screen before us -- and this is especially true for our perception of what constitutes effective narrative.

The sophistication of modern film techniques, the artistic vision of the prominent popular directors such as Steven Spielberg, George Lucas, Ron Howard and Francis Ford Coppola and the inventive genius of the whizz-kids at Industrial Light and Magic have blurred or even obliterated the distinction between audience and participant which existed in the films (and, importantly, in the literature) of earlier generations.

And it is not just the high budget movies, with their special effects, intimate camera angles and protagonist's-eye-view of proceedings. Consider the documentaries and new broadcasts and their 'be-there-as-it-happens' approach to wars, disasters, sporting events and even violent crimes. Today's young people are carried (via satellite) to the very rim of the erupting volcano or into the midst of the latest student riot in Seoul; they fly down the straight at 300 kph with the touring cars

(courtesy of 'race-cam'); with no particular sense of wonder or disorientation, they may travel down a major artery along with the optic-fibre micro-camera and watch a heart beating from the inside, or see that same heart beating beside the hands of a surgeon during a sensitive by-pass operation.

Conditioned by a paternalistic political and religious system, a parent-dominated regime at home and a teacher-centred, authoritarian school hierarchy, readers of my generation -- and innumerable generations before mine -- found it perfectly appropriate that the narrative-style of the books we read was author-centred; full of exposition and authority. We were passive observers, a receptive audience.

Intellectually, habitually, the post-Spielberg generation is a generation of vicarious participants -- not passive observers. This is not a good thing or a bad thing, it is a fact, and it serves little purpose for us, as writers, reviewers, educators -- or parents, to look back towards the supposedly halcyon days of our own youth and the style of literature which then held sway and bemoan the fact that today's youth simply cannot (or will not?) read it.

Exactly the form the evolving Literature will take is still unclear, but 'interactive' will certainly mean more than merely allowing the reader to flit electronically back and forth through the text, or choose what the hero will do next. Such suggestions may work for vacuous narratives, but Literature involves much more then manipulation of plot.

An interesting discussion of this issue is to be found in David Farmer's article 'Writing interactively (without getting lôst)' [*Australian Author* 28 (1), Autumn, 1996] which discusses the effect of the new technologies on the narrative styles and techniques of the creative writer. Speaking of the interactive manipulation of text, where 'the reader clicks on part of a computer screen, to select one of the options offered by the author', Farmer (1996:22) asks the question, 'what happens to a creative writer's ability to heighten tension through the orchestrated flow of his or her work... ?'.

Apart from the wholesale reproduction of written texts in electronic form, the best that appears to be on offer in the near-future as literature on the Net or even manipulating CD-ROM technology, is a more sophisticated electronic variation of the eighties children's book phenomenon 'Choose Your Own Adventure' -- or perhaps an evolution along the lines of 'Choose Your Own Adventure - And Add Bits'. In print, this genre lost its appeal quite rapidly, due to the (necessarily) shallow nature of the 'tree-fiction' construction of the narrative, and its inability to develop credible characters or sustain any serious themes.

Except as a method of dissemination of the finished work, then, the communications revolution is not throwing up any serious alternatives to the traditional way of telling stories in print, even if -- as I suggested earlier -- the environment it is creating is having an influence on the narrative method actually employed by writers.

Electronic books, improved screen-technology and gigabytes of portable memory may allow for the expansion of the scope of any story -- for the inclusion of such peripherals as movie images of scene, or even characters, or the detailed historical background, or scientific rationale behind a particular plot -- even the facility for the 'book' to read itself to the 'reader' -- but ultimately it is the narrative method of the novel itself which must change.

The changing perspectives of multiple narrators, a cinematic manipulation of time sequences, the shift from the 'close-up' of the first person voice to the 'wide-angle' of the third person, the manipulation of different media -- the list is endless, but the aim is to place the reader at the centre of the experience, not on the outside, looking in.

Perhaps what will evolve will be something of a hybrid between film and novel, or film and novel and CD-ROM. Almost certainly it will move beyond the printed word... But we kill too many trees anyway.

I have steered clear, in this paper, of any discussion of the effect of new technologies on the notion of copyright. This is an area which many regard as the real threat of the electronics revolution to the future existence of writers, as the lack of protection of intellectual property has the potential to

remove the writer's only real source of income -- the payment of royalties -- destroying the ability of many to follow writing as a full-time, or even part-time occupation. Ways must be found of ensuring the rights of authors in this regard, or of devising some other form of remuneration for creative artists whose work is so easily and cheaply disseminated and appropriated. Otherwise, we face the prospect of having no new writings to disseminate, and economics will have achieved what war and repression -- and even TV -- could not.

This achieved, the challenge for the creative artist, writing in the era of the information Super-Highway-is exciting -- providing he can pedal fast enough to keep ahead of the on-coming traffic.

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THE IMPACT OF THE NET ON CHILDREN'S LITERATURE: POINTS OF VIEW

A Topic C listserv discussion with Suzette Boyd, James Henri and Zoe Lake...

From: "Teacher Librarian - Strand C" <tlC@itec.com.au>
Organization: Methodist Ladies' College
To: tlc@itec.com.au
Date sent: Thu, 6 Jun 1996 15:29:45 EST
Subject: Lit on the web
Priority: normal

Hello out there!! Has anyone else having trouble today getting onto the papers. I've just registered for this strand and would like to comment on the recent CBC conference in Brisbane. As far as the CBC goes the Internet doesn't exist. This conference only occurs once every 2 years and yet again this year there was no Internet room available, no discussion, papers or the remotest mention of how the web can be or is being used to promote/publish Children's literature.

At MLC our Literature Club is embarking on its own Homepage production, where our students will be doing book reviews, author interviews, best books lists and also publishing student's writing. They have been taken to some of the best Literature sites on the web, via our Library Home Page **<http://www.mlckew.edu.au/library/>** and they are all learning Hot Dog.

If anyone would like to ask a student how they have used the web, I have registered Zoe, one of my Lit Club students for this conference and she would love to answer your questions.

Suzette Boyd

From: "Teacher Librarian - Strand C" <tlC@itec.com.au>
Organization: Charles Sturt University
To: tlC@itec.com.au
Date sent: Thu, 6 Jun 1996 15:51:00 GMT-10
Subject: Re: Lit on the web
Send reply to: jhenri@csu.EDU.AU
Priority: normal

Hi there Zoe

Why do kids want to do Children's Lit on the WWW? And do you still 'do' real books?

Thanks for joining in!!

cheers james henri
jhenri@csu.edu.au

From: "Teacher Librarian - Strand C" <tlC@itec.com.au>
Organization: Methodist Ladies' College
To: tlc@itec.com.au
Date sent: Fri, 7 Jun 1996 13:47:12 EST
Subject: Literature on the web
Priority: normal

After trying for three days to register, I have finally done it!!

My name is Zoe and I am a Year Nine student at MLC. I will start by saying that some of the stuff that I have found on the web is FANTASTIC!

James Henri asked me: "What do kids want to do on the WWW? Do kids still 'do' books?"

If you mean read books, of course we do! I don't think that kids will ever give up reading books, even if they can go and see the movie. The books are often a lot better than the movies. Here are some examples. I saw the movie of *The Power of One* at school. I thought that it was the best movie that I had ever seen. Then I read the book. I discovered (after two chapters) that the book comes out so far ahead of the movie, the book makes the movie seem terrible! Also with *Forrest Gump*, I saw the movie, then read the book - exactly the same thing happened. When making movies, there are some things that the directors cannot make with special effects, but those things are a pushover for your imagination. They end up having to leave out half of the story (unless it is a TV series) because there is only a certain amount that you can show in a two hour time slot.

I think that basically, kids want to be able to find cool stuff about their favourite books and authors on the web. One page that is great for that is in the *Oz Literature Web Guide*. (sorry, I don't know that address). It has a list of the best books, Awards listings, and info about movies and TV shows which are based on books, eg. *Jumanji* - a new movie starring Kirsten Dunst and Robin Williams. At **<http://spebbn.spe.sony.com/Pictures/SonyMusic/Jumanji/board.html>** you can actually PLAY the game as they did in the movie. It is like a board game where you answer riddles to move your game piece. It is FANTASTIC!!!! It includes a screen saver for downloading, behind the scenes info and other cool stuff.

Oz Lit's WWW Literary Links takes you to heaps of Literary sites around the world as well as everything about AusLit. It has book reviews, Literary news, lists of Authors, competitions and writers' resources on the web.

The Authors Page includes email addresses of overseas authors (mainly adult authors). For example, the Michael Crichton page includes summaries of his books and info about him.

Ashley Freeman asked me "Is Literature on the Net both fun and worthwhile?"

My answer is: ABSOLUTELY! The web is a good way to read literature because, as you are looking up one thing, you 'accidentally stumble' on something else that is interesting. There are so many literature sites, each one of them is interesting in its own way.

If anyone is studying Shakespeare - I have the site for you!!

The complete works of William Shakespeare is at **<http://the-tech.mit.edu/Shakespeare/>**. It is a list of ALL Shakepeare's plays in categories - Comedy, History, Tragedy and Poetry. It has great information about him and his works. It is definitely worth a look.

Any questions can be written to my email at <lakezh@mlckew.edu.au>.

By Zoe Lake

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